

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING – JANUARY 28, 2014 – BISMARCK, ND

Jill Howard, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations, NRCS was the facilitator of the meeting. Jill welcomed all attendees and introduced NRCS State Conservationist Mary Podoll.

Mary Podoll – NRCS - State Conservationist

Welcomed everyone - reviewed North Dakota NRCS activities in 2013; SCD partnership, including attending the National NACD Meeting and the 75th Anniversary NASCD Meeting; wetland compliance; North Dakota Department of Health and the National Water Quality Initiative; Soil Health, both cropland and rangeland; Strikeforce; Cultural Transformation, policies within NRCS to include teleworking, hiring practices, and training; State Leadership Development Program, this is the third year for this program to provide leadership training; Envirothon participation; Baaken tour and discussions on the impacts of the oil boom; Pollinators, attend meetings, workshops, etc.; and easement review that was conducted and had a successful report.

Jill Howard – NRCS – Assistant State Conservationist for Operations

Reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the State Technical Committee found in the NRCS General Manual, Title 440 – Programs, Part 501 – USDA Conservation Program Delivery.

1. Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
2. Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
3. Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
4. Recommend State and National program policy based on resource data.
5. Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
6. Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
7. Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

Jennifer Heglund – NRCS – Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Presented the attached slide presentation (Conservation Programs in North Dakota, Fiscal Year 2013 Report). Gave a brief overview of FY14 programs, including the Honeybee Pollinator Effort and the Prairie Pothole Region Project.

Todd Hagel – NRCS – Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources

Presented the attached Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) presentation (FY13 WRP). Benefits of the WRP are to restore wetlands with sediment removal, ditch plug, etc. Showed slides of the steps involved for restoring a wetland.

Introduced Strikeforce with a short video showing what Strikeforce is and who can benefit from the initiative. North Dakota was added in 2013, currently there are 20 States participating (see attachment). USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA) is the chairperson for the Strikeforce Initiative in 2014.

Aaron Krauter – FSA – State Executive Director

Reviewed the Strikeforce Initiative, briefly talked about the demographics of the counties included in North Dakota. Introduced Brad Olsen, Chief Conservation Officer, who has taken Jim Jost's position.







Commented on the Farm Bill and where it currently stands in Congress. Mentioned several items of interest to the FSA - Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and the Livestock Forage Program (LFP) - retroactive to 2012; Pollinators - Colony Collapse Disorder; CRP - acres are being reduced each year; Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) – target prices; Price Loss Component (PLC) – updated base acres, yields, etc.; and there will be a one-time election for a five year commitment.

Rhonda Vetsch – NCDEA – North Dakota President

“Two Partners – One Mission”, the Forest Service had carryover dollars they wanted to put to good use and the NDASCD wanted to enhance education outreach to promote conservation tree planting so together they developed the North Dakota Tree Promotion Initiative. The grant was received and used for media outreach. Developed a new brochure, titled, “Strengthening Our Roots”, it was completed in November 2013, released for distribution. Worked with CAT Communications on two PSA's (commercials), these are being aired at no cost. Also updated the logo for “branding” (see attachment).

Spoke about the Outdoor Heritage Fund – the NDASCD submitted a proposal for a grant to promote the North Dakota Statewide Tree Planting Initiative. The process started with a phone call; initial visit with sponsors of the initiative measure; meetings with State and Federal Agencies; district surveys were conducted to find out the needs of the customers; stayed visible to the State legislators on the importance of outdoor conservation; and supported others with the same conservation mission.

ND Statewide Conservation Tree Planting Initiative:

-  NDASCD & Districts – three year project – duration for tree plantings.
-  Utilized in kind dollars with conservation districts to leverage matching funds for technical staff.
-  Producer cost share – 60/40.
-  Producer outreach established and continually used.
-  Grant proposal was for 2.5 M for three years.
-  Approved for \$1.8 M for three years.

NDASCD plan to have a Conservation Education Day with the State legislators - need to emphasize the conservation districts are not a Government entity.

Wade Bott – NRCS – State Soil Scientist

Focus is on Soil Health Initiative – “Education in a Bucket”, contains soil quality tools, recommends purchasing a few items at a time; may be expensive to buy all the items at once. Intention is to get these soil health items into the hands of the educators (teachers) who will pass the information to the students. Held a training session for professors and teachers, it went well and was very productive.

Mary Podoll – NRCS – State Conservationist

What’s on Your Mind for Conservation? – Question and comment period for all State Technical Committee members.

1. Managing water (wetlands) to produce crops – example of planting sunflowers that were picked clean by birds, the birds were attracted to the sunflowers because of the wetland. Chose not to participate in the farm programs because of the time constraints.
2. Baaken oil field issues – landowner and renter issues. Need better communication between the producers and the Federal agencies, i.e., producers have a contract on their land and use acreage for an oil well site; they neglect to tell the Federal agency about the acres taken out of the contract for the oil well.
3. Managing water for irrigation – retention ponds for irrigation – technology to shut off irrigators.
4. Ducks Unlimited has submitted 3 Outdoor Heritage Fund applications. One application has been approved; the other two are up for voting today. Ducks Unlimited projects are to produce waterfowl and other migratory birds. Wetlands (shallow ones) are important for nesting habitat – believe producers should be compensated for those wetlands.
5. Prairie Pothole Initiative – requested more information. The focus is on the prairie pothole region and the unique conservation concerns, hope to have more information in February.
6. Restoration/mitigation of wetlands, i.e., irrigation, dams, levees – may need permits from the Corps of Engineers, the COE may have jurisdiction over the body of water.
7. ARS will be holding a Customer Focus Group Meeting on Thursday, February 6, all are invited to attend and participate. March 3 is the Research Results Conference at the Seven Seas in Mandan and July 17 is Friends & Neighbors Day, be sure to mark your calendars.
8. North Dakota Department of Health is planning a Water Quality Conference (monitoring and assessment), in the process of selecting the speakers. Nutrient Reduction Strategy – asking for input on how North Dakota manages nutrients. Once the feedback is received, will break into work groups to work on the different components. Open to all who would like to participate. Requested a list/explanation of conservation programs from all agencies, US Fish & Wildlife, ND Game & Fish, Ducks Unlimited, etc. Suggested soil health become the main focus and other conservation problems will be addressed. Noticed a resurgent of interest in animal feeding operations installation as well as design and planning. Where does CNMP/cost share fit in?
9. Legislative members are waiting on the final votes of the Farm Bill – may notice consolidation of programs in the new Farm Bill. Comment was made regarding the 2008

Sod Saver Provision, the Governors in the Prairie Pothole Region States had the option to “opt in”, and none did so. This Farm Bill, the Sod Saver Provision will be mandatory for the five Prairie Pothole States plus Nebraska.

10. Stated the importance of rangeland and grasslands; ecological site descriptions are moving forward.

One last item was forming subcommittees to discuss the new Farm Bill information – decision was to dispense all the information to committee members, and the members can chose to participate, i.e., respond with issues and concerns. If there appears to be too many people involved to effectively coordinate the issue/concern, may need to form subcommittees.

Respectfully Submitted,

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